

# A STUDY OF CHINESE UNIVERSITY EFL LEARNERS' FOREIGN LANGUAGE LISTENING ANXIETY, LISTENING STRATEGY USE AND LISTENING PERFORMANCE

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## Abstract

The present study examined foreign language (FL) listening anxiety and listening strategy use in relation to FL listening comprehension performance of 1702 undergraduate EFL learners from 5 universities in China. Analyses of the survey data revealed the following findings: (1) more than half of the students generally did not feel anxious when listening to English, were low in English listening proficiency, were not confident in or satisfied with their English listening proficiency, and usually moderately used different types of strategies when listening to English; (2) compared with their female counterparts, the male students felt significantly more anxious when facing listening activities and less satisfied with their English listening proficiency, used significantly more often the memory/attention/understanding-related strategies and were less proficient in English, employed significantly more often 'less active listener strategies' (FLLSUS6), but significantly less frequently the strategies of negotiation for meaning (FLLSUS1), maintaining fluency (FLLSUS2), getting the gist (FLLSUS4), and nonverbal strategies (FLLSUS5), (3) all FLLAS (Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale) and FLLSUS (Foreign Language Listening Strategy Use Scale) scales were highly significantly correlated with each other and the students' listening comprehension performance, and (4) FLLSUS6, FLLAS2, FLLAS3, FLLAS1, FLLSUS2, and FLLSUS1 were good predictors of English listening comprehension performance.

**Keywords:** foreign language, listening anxiety, listening strategy use, listening comprehension performance

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## INTRODUCTION

Second/Foreign language (SL/FL) learning has long been described as a “a profoundly unsettling psychological proposition because it directly threatens an individual’s self-concept and worldview” (Guiora, 1983, p. 8). Second language learners are argued to come to the SL/FL classroom with preconceived beliefs and expectations which when not met can potentially negatively impact on their ability to learn the language (Horwitz, 1990). The tension and frustration that results from this has been termed “foreign language classroom anxiety” (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986, p. 127). Defined as the “feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language contexts, including speaking, listening, and learning” (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994, p. 284), foreign language anxiety is perceived to be a “complex, multidimensional phenomenon” (Koul, Kaewkuekool & Ploisawaschai, 2009, p. 677). It has been considered an important affective variable influencing the outcomes of SL/FL learning (Horwitz, et al., 1986; Zhang, 2013).

While traditional FLA studies have tended to explore the causes and effects of FLA in general, more recent research has revealed that FLA has different facets such as speaking, writing, reading and listening anxieties with some learners reporting anxiety stemming from only the performance of specific skills (Bekleyen, 2007; Kimura, 2008; Pae, 2013). Previous skills-focused studies have tended to investigate anxiety associated with oral production (speaking) in SL/FL but more recently interest has been extended to all language skills (Kimura, 2008). Of the four language skills, however, listening has received the least attention partly because it is regarded as a passive skill that learners can acquire through classroom interaction (Vogely, 1999). Also, while with the other skills it is easy to notice when students are anxious, students’ discomfort in a listening activity is not easily discernible (Vogely, 1999; Bekleyen, 2009) and this makes listening problematic and particularly difficult to teach and ordinarily a hard skill to grasp (Oxford, 1993; Christenberry, 2003). Consequently, the anxiety accompanying listening comprehension (Foreign Language Listening Anxiety (FLLA)) has been argued to be potentially one of the most hampering types of anxiety (MacIntyre, 1995; Golchi, 2012). FLLA is the type of anxiety experienced by language learners in contexts requiring listening. Generally listening is considered to be a complex, problem-solving skill which goes beyond the perception of the sounds but involves comprehension of all meaning-bearing syntactic segments (words, phrases, clauses, sentences and connected discourse). It is hard to master even in one’s own language (Oxford, 1993). As such, the use of effective listening

strategies has been found helpful to overcome many of the challenges associated with target language listening (Oxford, 1990).

This paper reports on the findings of a study conducted to investigate FL listening anxiety and listening strategy use in relation to the FL listening comprehension performance of 1702 undergraduate EFL learners from 5 universities in China. The study aimed to explore the potential interrelationships among FL listening anxiety, FL listening strategy use, and English listening performance of the participants. We start the paper with a review of some of the key literature and concepts in the field of foreign language anxiety and strategy use and more specifically listening anxiety and strategy use. We then outline the methodological procedures followed in collecting data for this study, present the findings, discuss insights revealed by the findings and draw our conclusions.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXIETY (FLA)**

Research on SL/FL anxiety has revealed a web of learner variables that potentially intervene between SL/FL learning anxiety and SL/FL learning. For example, Brown and his colleagues (2001) explored the detrimental and facilitative effects of anxiety; Bailey, Daley, and Onwuebuozie (1999) considered the relationship between anxiety and learning style; Yamashiro and McLaughlin (2001) investigated the causes and consequences of anxiety. Numerous quantitative and qualitative studies have shown that FL anxiety exists in almost every aspect of SL/FL learning, that there is a consistently negative correlation between FL anxiety and SL/FL learning outcomes and that FL anxiety interacts with a multitude of other factors such as age, gender, past experiences and target language competence (Atasheneh & Izadi, 2012; Dewaele, 2007, 2010, 2013; Horwitz, 2001; Liu, 2006; Liu & Jackson, 2008; Vogely, 1998; Yan & Horwitz, 2008).

FLA is conceptually similar to three anxieties, namely, test anxiety, which stems from a fear of failure often occurring when one feels that “their capabilities are being evaluated” (Horwitz et al., 1986, p.127); fear of negative evaluation, referring to a learner’s avoidance of communicative contexts due to fear of being perceived by others (e.g. instructors, classmates etc.) as “being foolish” and/or “being less capable” and so on (Jones, 2004, p.30); and communication apprehension which is experienced when speaking or listening to other people and is the individual’s fear of real or anticipated communication with others (Richmond & McCroskey, 1998, p.37).

FLA has been noted to have a range of detrimental effects on students' confidence, self-esteem and level of participation demonstrated by for example, an unwillingness to communicate in the SL/FL outside the classroom, the social effect whereby learners with high anxiety level shy away from engaging in interpersonal communication with others; suffering from mental blocks during oral activities whereby cognitively, anxiety can act as an affective filter that inhibits some information from entering a learner's cognitive processing system; inability to identify errors and repair; employing avoidance strategies and even skipping class (Ely, 1986; MacIntyre, 1998). Anxiety may in some circumstances result in language learning becoming a traumatic experience (Crookall & Oxford, 1991). Overall, academically, language anxiety has been argued to be one of the main predictors of language proficiency as evidenced by the correlation of high levels of language anxiety with low levels of academic success in L2 learning (language learning and production) (MacIntyre, 1998).

### **FOREIGN LANGUAGE LISTENING ANXIETY (FLLA)**

Research has revealed a number of specific factors accounting for FLLA such as listening text authenticity, incomprehensibility, the fear of failure to interpret the message correctly due to task difficulty and task unfamiliarity (e.g., not knowing some of the vocabulary) and fear of embarrassing outcomes (Samaneh & Noordin, 2013; Scarcella & Oxford, 1992; Young, 1992). Examination conditions tend to worsen these difficulties. For example, the IELTS examination has been found to cause test anxiety in students who find listening to be particularly challenging due to difficulties of listening to the recordings and understanding the message (Rasti, 2009).

Research on the effects of anxiety on listening has revealed mixed views. For example, In'nami's (2006) study of the effect of test anxiety on listening test performance revealed no significant effects. On the other hand, Chang (2008) examined college students' FLLA in English classrooms and found that testing was the main source of anxiety.

Kim's (2000) study revealed a moderate association between listening anxiety and listening proficiency, which confirmed the rather obvious case that listening anxiety interferes with foreign language listening. Other research has pointed to the role of certain variables in determining the effect of FLLA. For example, Legac's (2007) study of FL anxiety and listening skill in Croatian monolingual and bilingual students of EFL indicated that bilingual students' level of listening anxiety was much lower than that of monolingual students. Duration of target language learning was

also found to be a factor with students with one to three years of studying English, for example, being found to be more anxious than those with seven to nine and nine to twelve years of English language training (Golchi, 2012). Gender is another significant factor with mixed results being reported. While Golchi's (2012) study found female learners to exhibit more anxiety than male students, earlier studies had reported no effect of gender on learners' listening anxiety (e.g., Elkhafaifi, 2005; Ko, 2010).

## **FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGY USE**

To manage and overcome the challenges they encounter during the second or foreign language learning process, it has been established that EFL/ESL learners develop strategies for learning and remembering information (e.g., Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006; Lee, 2010). They may however not be aware that they are using strategies and there are some strategies that they may need to be made aware of or taught. Identifying these strategies is important because of the benefit (e.g., learning more efficiently, having better learning outcomes) for students of using language learning strategies (Oxford, 1990).

Building on earlier studies into learning strategies (Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975; Naiman, Frohlich, Stern & Todesco, 1978), Oxford (1990) developed a comprehensive and detailed language learning strategy system, consisting of two main categories, namely direct strategies which are specific ways that involve use of language (sub-divided into memory, cognitive and compensation strategies) and indirect strategies which do not directly involve using the language, but support language learning. These strategies are further sub-divided into six broad categories of strategies including metacognitive (e.g. self-monitoring, paying attention); affective (e.g. self-encouragement, anxiety reduction); social (e.g. ask questions, become culturally aware); memory (e.g. grouping, imagery, associating); cognitive (e.g. reasoning, analyzing, summarizing) and; compensation (e.g. guessing meanings, using synonyms). These categories are the basis of Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), a commonly used instrument developed to test ESL/EFL learners' strategy use (e.g. Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006; Lee, 2010). These studies have generally revealed that significant relationships exist between language learning strategies and language proficiency with language learners who use language learning strategies more than others generally achieving greater language proficiency. While both successful and unsuccessful language learners employed the same strategies considered useful, they differed in that successful language learners used a wider range of strategies more frequently and appropriately than unsuccessful ones (Abraham & Vann 1987,

Vann & Abraham, 1990). In addition, Ehrman and Oxford (1995) found that only cognitive strategies significantly influenced ESL/EFL learners' proficiency outcomes.

Meanwhile, various variables have been found to interact with anxiety and strategy use during the process of language learning (Ehrman & Oxford, 1989; Oxford, 1993; Tran, 1988; Wharton, 2000). In terms of gender differences in the use of language learning strategies research has shown female learners as more frequent users of strategies (e.g. Ehrman & Oxford, 1989; Oxford, 1993). Culture has however been noted to play a role in determining gender differences with a study of adult Vietnamese refugees Tran (1988) having found that males were more likely to use diverse learning strategies than females due to pressure on refugee men resulting in them being highly motivated to learn English to increase their employment chances for the survival of their families. Other factors such as bilingualism have revealed no significant difference due to the perceived high capabilities of bilingual learners in language learning which is believed to equalize potential gender differences in strategy use (Wharton, 2000).

More recently research has started looking at strategies used for learning specific skills and the following section looks at studies that have explored listening strategy use.

## **FOREIGN LANGUAGE LISTENING STRATEGY USE**

The challenges posed by the listening skill on foreign language learners in general has drawn researchers' interest in listening strategy use (Bekleyen, 2009; Hayati & Jalilifar, 2009; Kao, 2006; Roussel, 2011; Vandergrift, 2003). Ho (2006, p.25) defines these listening strategies as "...skills or methods for listeners to directly or indirectly achieve the purpose of listening comprehension of the spoken input". As with general language learning strategies these strategies have been broadly divided into three categories, that is, metacognitive strategies (self-regulated learning e.g. plan, monitor, revise, evaluate etc.); cognitive strategies (application of a specific technique to a listening task e.g. predicting, inferencing, visualizing etc.); and socio-affective strategies (techniques for corroborating with others to confirm understanding and lower anxiety) (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Vandergrift, 1997, 1999, 2003).

Diverse studies have been conducted to investigate L2 learners' listening strategies and the tactics that they employ. For example, Fujita's (1984) investigation of Japanese beginning college students, Goh's (2002) examination of Chinese ESL learners, Vandergrift's (2003) study of students of French in Canada Kao's (2006) study of Taiwanese EFL learners

and more recently Golchi's (2012) investigation of Iranian IELTS learners have all revealed key results. More proficient listeners or higher ability learners demonstrate more effective use of both cognitive and metacognitive strategies than less proficient learners and as noted by Sioson (2011) when students use more metacognitive strategies they experience less communication apprehension and fear and generally feel less anxious. The studies also showed that when there is an increase in FLLA, strategy use decreases thereby indicating a negative correlation in the relationship between listening anxiety and listening strategy use. No significant differences were noted in both high and low anxious learners' employment of social and affective strategies.

The findings are confirmed by Nakatani who used the Oral Communication Strategy Inventory (OCSI) (Nakatani, 2006) to elicit learners' communication strategies. The OCSI's listening component consisted of seven factors, that is, negotiation for listening, fluency-maintaining, scanning, getting the gist, non-verbal message, less active listener, and word oriented strategies. This instrument was found to have a highly acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha .85 for the listening component) and it also correlated well with the SILL (Oxford 1990) ( $r = 0.57$ ). They were further partially confirmed by Liu (2009) who found that the students tended to employ memory strategies as a means of achieving listening comprehension.

These findings highlight Mendelsohn's (1994) observation that carefully designed listening strategy use is necessary to help improve learner performance and also help reduce listening anxiety and promote learner autonomy. However, results depend on the support given and some forms of listening support have been found to make a difference, for example, Chang's (2008) investigation of the effect of four forms of listening support (pre-teaching of content and vocabulary, question preview, and repeated input) on the anxiety levels of Taiwanese college students showed significant differences in anxiety of learners who had been anxious prior to the test and this varied according to the type of support and level of proficiency. No statistical differences in listening anxiety levels were found however in Ko's (2010) study involving the use of pedagogical agents in computer-based listening activities between students who worked with the agent and students who did not.

The above discussion of existing literature demonstrates that while listening has been researched in various EFL/ESL situations, many of the results are not conclusive and there are gaps in the literature which require further exploration. Even so, studies concerning SL/FL listening anxiety are still rather limited and even fewer have explored the interaction of FL listening anxiety with specific learner factors such as gender

(Noormohamadi, 2009). In exploring the potential interrelationships among FL listening anxiety, FL listening strategy use, and English listening performance of the chosen learners in the current study, the following research questions were formulated:

- (1) What are the general pattern of the students' FL listening anxiety and FL listening strategy use when dealing with a listening task?
- (2) How is the students' FL listening anxiety related to their listening strategy use?
- (3) How are the students' FL listening anxiety and FL listening strategy use correlated with their FL listening comprehension performance?

## THE PRESENT STUDY

**Participants.** Altogether 1702 (778 males and 924 females) first-year (1174) and second-year (528) students from 5 universities in China participated in the present study. With an average age of 19 and an age range of 16 to 24, the students were from various disciplines such as electronic engineering, business and administration, chemistry, mathematics and Chinese.

**Instruments.** The participants in the present study answered three questionnaires and took a listening test, as detailed below.

*Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale.* Achieving a reliability score of .901 in the present study, the 20-item Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale (FLLAS) was adopted from that used in Elkhafaifi (2005) and Zhang (2013). As revealed by Zhang (2013), FLLAS has three factors: Listening anxiety (FLLAS1) which includes 5 items (items 1, 4-6, 8) reflective of nervousness, upset/distress, or feeling intimidated when facing listening activities, self-belief (FLLAS2) which has 3 items (items 12-13, 18) common in traits of confidence and satisfaction with one's FL listening proficiency, and FL listening decoding skills (FLLAS3) which comprise 3 items (items 3, 9-10) tapping learners' cognitive ability related to memory, attention and understanding (with high scores for these indicators suggesting low proficiency in listening).

*Foreign Language Listening Strategy Use Scale.* With a reliability score of .893 in the present study, the 26-item Foreign Language Listening Strategy Use Scale (FLLSUS) was adopted from that developed by Nakatani (2010). According to Nakatani (2010), FLLSUS has 7 dimensions: (1) negotiation for meaning while listening (FLLSUS1) (items 39-43), (2) fluency-maintaining strategies (FLLSUS2) (items 30, 33-36), (3) scanning strategies (FLLSUS3) (items 25, 32, 45-46), (4) getting the gist strategies



(FLLSUS4) (items 26-29), (5) nonverbal strategies while listening (FLLSUS5) (items 37-38), (6) less active listener strategies (FLLSUS6) (items 31, 34), and (7) word-oriented strategies (FLLSUS7) (items 21-24).

*The background questionnaire.* The background questionnaire aimed to collect personal information such as gender, age, university, and year of study.

All the items except the background questionnaire items were accompanied by a 5-point scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree” for items 1-20 or “Never or almost never true of me” to “Always true of me” for items 21 to 46.

*English listening comprehension test.* The English listening comprehension test comprised the following parts: multiple-choice questions for 10 short dialogues (20%), questions of various types for 2 essays of around 500 words and 1 of around 1000 words (80%).

**Procedure.** All the items were translated into Chinese and double-checked. After that, the questionnaire was administered to 40 intact classes of first- and second-year students in 5 universities in China in Chinese, who finished it in 15-20 minutes and then took the English listening test in 45 minutes in class in the 14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> week of the 18-week semester.

**Data Analysis.** Statistical analyses were conducted on the Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale (FLLAS) and Foreign Language Listening Strategy Use Scale (FLLSUS) in terms of mean, standard deviation, median, mode, and score range to determine the extent to which the respondents felt anxious in English classrooms (research question 1). Independent samples t-tests were then run to explore the difference in the measured variables between male and female students (research question 1). And correlational analyses were conducted to examine the correlations between the measured variables (research question 2) and the students’ performance in English listening (research question 3). In order to examine the impact of FL listening anxiety and strategy use on students’ FL listening performance, multiple regression analyses were also conducted (research question 3).

## RESULTS

As described above, both FLLAS and FLLSUS were 5-point Likert scales, thus a score of 4-5, 3-5, and below 3 on the scale means strong agreement, agreement and no/little agreement respectively. When computing the scores, the researchers adjusted the values assigned to different alternatives of items 12-14 and 18 which expressed confidence in listening English. For these items, the response “Strongly Disagree” received a score of 5 instead of 1, the response “Strongly Agree” was given a value of 1

instead of 5, and so on. Thus, the total score of the FLLAS revealed the respondent's anxiety in listening English; and the total score of the FLLSUS was reflective of the frequency of strategy use when listening to English. It was the same with their components.

### **GENERAL PATTERN OF THE STUDENTS' FL LISTENING ANXIETY AND STRATEGY USE**

As shown in Table 1, the participants scored 3.22 on FLLAS2 and below the scale mid-point of 3 on FLLAS and its other two components. This means that more than half of the students generally did not feel anxious when listening to English (FLLAS & FLLAS1), were low in English listening proficiency (FLLAS3), and were not confident in or satisfied with their English listening proficiency (FLLAS2). Meanwhile, Table 1 shows that the participants scored from 3.01 to 3.58 on FLLSUS and its 7 components, meaning that more than half of the participants usually used those types of strategies when listening to English.

TABLE 1  
Statistical Analyses of the Measured Variables (N = 1702)

	FLLAS1	FLLAS2	FLLAS3	FLLAS	FLLSUS1	FLLSUS2	FLLSUS3	FLLSUS4	FLLSUS5	FLLSUS6	FLLSUS7	FLLSUS
Mean	2.71	3.22	2.95	2.85	3.55	3.51	3.33	3.58	3.58	3.01	3.36	3.44
SD	.75	.78	.80	.51	.66	.64	.63	.63	.79	.77	.63	.47

In order to explore the general pattern of FL listening anxiety and listening strategy use for male and female students as well, we computed the means and standard deviations of FLLAS and FLLSUS for both males and females (see Table 2). The results showed that male students scored higher on all the FFLAS scales and FLLSUS6 but lower on all the other FLLSUS scales than females. And the differences were all statistically significant on all the scales except FLLSUS3 and FLLSUS7, though the effect size was small (Cohen, 1998), as evidenced by the independent samples T-test results reported in Table 2. This suggests that compared with their female counterparts, the male students felt significantly more anxious when facing listening activities, less satisfied with their English listening proficiency, used more often the memory/attention/understanding-related strategies and less proficient in English, used more often 'less active listener strategies' (FLLSUS6), and employed less frequently the strategies of negotiation for meaning (FLLSUS1), maintaining fluency (FLLSUS2), getting the gist (FLLSUS4), and nonverbal strategies (FLLSUS5).

TABLE 2  
Independent Samples T-test Results  
of Gender Difference in the FLCAS and its Components (N = 1702)

	Male	Female	t-test result			
			T	p	Mean difference	Effect size
FLLAS1	2.76	2.67	2.496	.013	.456	0.12
FLLAS2	3.28	3.17	2.677	.008	.306	0.13
FLLA3	3.02	2.88	3.535	.000	.413	0.17
FLLAS	2.91	2.80	4.762	.000	2.324	0.23
FLLSUS1	3.49	3.56	-3.535	.000	-.566	0.17
FLLSUS2	3.43	3.59	-5.165	.000	-.797	0.25
FLLSUS3	3.31	3.34	-1.080	.280	-.133	/
FLLSUS4	3.49	3.65	-4.995	.000	-.612	0.24
FLLSUS5	3.49	3.67	-4.788	.000	-.364	0.23
FLLSUS6	3.05	2.98	1.977	.048	.148	0.096
FLLSUS7	3.35	3.37	-.898	.370	-.110	/
FLLSUS	3.39	3.49	-4.145	.000	-2.433	0.20

### CORRELATIONS AMONG FLLAS, FLLSUS AND LISTENING PERFORMANCE IN ENGLISH

To explore the correlations among the measured variables, correlational analyses two-tailed) were run, and the results are reported in Tables 3 and 4.

TABLE 3  
Correlations among the Measured Variables

	FLLAS2	FLLAS3	FLLAS	FLLSUS1	FLLSUS2	FLLSUS3	FLLSUS4	FLLSUS5	FLLSUS6	FLLSUS7	FLLSUS
FLLAS1	.370**	.615**	.859**	-.159**	-.215**	-.093**	-.232**	-.171**	.190**	-.018	-.170**
FLLAS2	1	.373**	.583**	-.164**	-.231**	-.190**	-.175**	-.167**	.087**	-.066**	-.206**
FLLAS3		1	.782**	-.116**	-.201**	-.078**	-.193**	-.124**	.232**	.009	-.126**
FLLAS			1	-.185**	-.275**	-.121**	-.256**	-.215**	.251**	-.030	-.204**
FLLSUS 1				1	.563**	.415**	.469**	.498**	.127**	.378**	.764**
FLLSUS 2					1	.482**	.574**	.563**	.064**	.458**	.813**
FLLSUS 3						1	.464**	.394**	.229**	.523**	.734**
FLLSUS 4							1	.486**	.070**	.412**	.742**
FLLSUS 5								1	.039	.369**	.678**
FLLSUS 6									1	.228**	.293**
FLLSUS 7										1	.703**

Notes: \*\* = p .01; \* = p .05

As noted from Table 3, all the FFLAS and the FLLSUS scales were highly significantly correlated with one another within the scales. This means that, for example, a student who felt nervous when facing listening activities

(FLLAS1) tended to be less confident in his/her English listening proficiency (FLLAS2), and a student who used more frequently the strategies of negotiation for meaning (FLLSUS1) tended to use other types of listening strategies more such as scanning strategies (FLLSUS3). Meanwhile, all the FLLAS scales were significantly positively correlated with FLLSUS6 (with a coefficient range of .087 ~ .251,  $p < .01$ ) and negatively correlated with the other FLLSUS scales except FLLSUS7, with a coefficient range of -.078 ~ -.275 ( $p < .01$ ). This indicates that a student who was anxious about listening to English tended to use different types of listening strategies less. For example, a less confident listener of English tended to use strategies for maintaining fluency (FLLSUS2) less frequently. And understandably, they would use 'less active listener strategies' (FLLSUS6) more frequently.

In addition, as shown in Table 4, all the FLLAS scales except FLLCAS1 were significantly inversely related to the students' listening test performance, with a coefficient range of -.109 ~ -.119 ( $p < .01$ ). Among the FLLSUS scales, only FLLSUS2 ( $r = .064$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and FLLSUS5 ( $r = .053$ ,  $p < .01$ ) were significantly positively and FLLSUS6 ( $r = -.149$ ,  $p < .01$ ) significantly negatively correlated with the latter. Alternatively, a student who was less confident in or satisfied with his/her English listening proficiency (FLLAS2), less proficient in English listening (FLLAS3), anxious about English listening (FLLAS), or used 'less active listener strategies' (FLLSUS6) more frequently tended to perform worse in the English listening test. By contrast, a student who used (fluency-maintaining strategies (FLLSUS2) and nonverbal strategies (FLLSUS5) more frequently tended to do better in the test.

TABLE 4  
Correlations between the  
Measured Variables and Listening Test Performance

	FLLAS1	FLLAS2	FLLAS3	FLLAS	FLLSUS1	FLLSUS2	FLLSUS3	FLLSUS4	FLLSUS5	FLLSUS6	FLLSUS7	FLLSUS
TP	-.036	-.114**	-.119**	-.109**	-.043	.064**	.004	.017	.053*	-.149**	-.021	-.007

Notes: TP = listening test performance; \*\* =  $p < .01$ ; \* =  $p < .05$

## THE REGRESSION MODEL

The results of the correlational analyses discussed previously show numerous bivariate relationships, which failed to indicate the influence of one variable on another. Better clues were provided by multiple regression analyses. A stepwise method was employed in forming regression models. Altogether 6 models were resulted with the change in  $R^2$  being all significant: .022 for model 1 (FLLSUS6), .010 for model 2 (FLLSUS6, FLLAS2), .003 for model 3 (FLLSUS6, FLLAS2, FLLAS3), .005 for model

4 (FLLSUS6, FLLAS2, FLLAS3, FLLAS1), .003 for model 5 (FLLSUS6, FLLAS2, FLLAS3, FLLAS1, FLLSUS2), and .006 for model 6 (FLLSUS6, FLLAS2, FLLAS3, FLLAS1, FLLSUS2, FLLSUS1). Model 6, with the change in  $R^2$  of .000 at the .013 level, included 6 variables—FLLSUS6, FLLAS2, FLLAS3, FLLAS1, FLLSUS2, and FLLSUS1, which was the best for the present study. The results are shown in Table 5, which reports coefficients from the regression models, as well as their levels of significance.

**TABLE 5**  
Regression Coefficients and Significance

		FLLSUS6	FLLAS2	FLLAS3	FLLAS1	FLLSUS2	FLLSUS1
Listening test performance	$\beta$	-.129	-.091	-.102	.092	.106	-.098
	T	-5.21	-3.44	-3.25	2.97	3.61	-3.40
	P	.000	.001	.001	.003	.000	.001
	VIF	1.09	1.24	1.72	1.70	1.53	1.49

As can be seen, all the coefficients were statistically significant at the .000-.003 level. Among the six included variables, FLLSUS6 was the most powerful predictor ( $\beta = -.129$ ,  $t = -5.21$ ), followed by FLLAS2 ( $\beta = -.091$ ,  $t = -3.44$ ), FLLAS3 ( $\beta = -.102$ ,  $t = -3.25$ ), FLLAS1 ( $\beta = .092$ ,  $t = 2.97$ ), FLLSUS2 ( $\beta = .106$ ,  $t = 3.61$ ), and FLLSUS1 ( $\beta = -.098$ ,  $t = -3.40$ ). FLLAS1 and FLLSUS2 were positive predictors, while the others were negative ones.

## DISCUSSION

### General Pattern of the Students' FL Listening Anxiety and Strategy Use.

Statistical analyses showed that more than half of the students generally did not feel anxious when listening to English, were low in English listening proficiency, and were not confident in or satisfied with their English listening proficiency. All these are consistent with the findings in existing studies (Atasheneh & Izadi, 2012; Horwitz, 2001; Liu, 2006; Liu & Hu, 2009; Liu & Jackson, 2008; Vogely, 1998; Yan & Horwitz, 2008). This might be because, as already noted in the literature (Vogely, 1999), listening is often perceived to be a passive activity in FL/SL learning and usually does not require oral communication with others while listening in a FL/SL. If immediate oral interaction was required, the FL listener might become anxious, as happened in Brantmeier (2005).

Meanwhile, more than half of the correspondents moderately used different types of listening strategies such as negotiating for meaning, maintaining fluency, scanning, and getting the gist, when listening to English, consistent with findings on the use of general strategies (Lu & Liu, 2011; Wenden & Rubin, 1987). This might be because when handling a FL listening task, the learner has to receive and digest countless information for various purposes. Consequently, s/he has to utilize different strategies during the fast-pacing and impromptu process.

Independent samples t-tests revealed that compared with girl students, the men students felt significantly more anxious when confronting listening activities, less satisfied with their English listening proficiency, used more often the memory/attention/understanding-related strategies and were less proficient in English, employed significantly more often 'less active listener strategies' (FLLSUS6), but significantly less frequently the strategies of negotiation for meaning (FLLSUS1), maintaining fluency (FLLSUS2), getting the gist, and nonverbal strategies (FLLSUS5). Though the strategy use-related findings were similar to those in current studies (Ehrman & Oxford, 1989; Oxford, 1993), the anxiety-related findings were contrary to those of Elkhafaifi (2005) and Ko (2010) whose studies revealed no significant differences between males and females in FL listening anxiety. This is virtually unexpected in that men have usually been regarded as being more competent, more useful, and enjoying more privileges in the Chinese culture. Several reasons might have contributed to these unexpected results such as general English proficiency, English listening comprehension proficiency, self-beliefs, attitudes and motivation, and English listening experiences, which justifies the need for continuous research on gender difference in levels of FL listening anxiety and strategy use in this context.

### **Correlations between FLLAS and FLLSUS and English Listening Performance.**

Correlational analyses indicated that all the FLLAS and the FLLSUS scales were highly significantly related with each other, as found in research on general FLA and strategy use (Lu & Liu, 2011; Nakatani, 2006).

At the same time, both the students' FLLAS and FLLSUS were significantly correlated with the students' FL listening comprehension performance, as found in a series of studies on general FLA, FL listening anxiety and strategy use (Chang, 2008; Cohen, 1998; Collier, 2010; Golchi, 2012; Grenfell & Macaro, 2007; In'nami, 2006; Kao, 2006; Kim, 2000; Legac, 2007; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1996; Sioson, 2011). Stepwise regression analyses showed that FLLSUS6, FLLAS2, FLLAS3,

FLLAS1, FLLSUS2, and FLLSUS1 were good predictors of English listening comprehension performance. Contrary to the results of correlation analyses presented in Table 4, FLLAS1 became a positive contributor while FLLSUS1 a negative one to the students' listening English comprehension performance. This was probably because, when working alone, anxiety negatively affected students' performance in English, as found in numerous studies reviewed before. Nevertheless, when interacting with other variables, anxiety might become a positive factor, so might do the use of certain types of strategy, as found in Liu and Zhang (2011). For this reason, the role of FL listening anxiety and strategy use in the learning of FL listening deserves further research. Future research can also focus on the causes of anxiety when dealing with a FL listening activity and strategies to help SL/FL learners to become less anxious and use better strategies during the FL listening process, as suggested Mendelsohn's (1994), Chang (1998) and Ko (2010).

## CONCLUSIONS

The present study examined FL listening anxiety and listening strategy use in 1702 undergraduate EFL learners from 5 universities in China. The study revealed the following findings: (1) more than half of the students generally did not feel anxious when listening to English, were low in English listening proficiency, and were not confident in or satisfied with their English listening proficiency, and usually moderately used different types of strategies when listening to English; (2) compared with their female counterparts, the male students felt significantly more anxious when facing listening activities, less satisfied with their English listening proficiency, used significantly more often the memory/attention/understanding-related strategies and were less proficient in English, employed significantly more often 'less active listener strategies' (FLLSUS6), but significantly less frequently the strategies of negotiation for meaning (FLLSUS1), maintaining fluency (FLLSUS2), of getting the gist, and nonverbal strategies (FLLSUS5), (3) all the FLLAS and the FLLSUS scales were highly significantly correlated with one another and the students' listening test performance, and (4) FLLSUS6, FLLAS2, FLLAS3, FLLAS1, FLLSUS2, and FLLSUS1 were good predictors of English listening test performance. Clearly, FL listening anxiety interacts closely with FL strategy use, which interactively impact students' FL listening performance. In addition, gender seems to play an important role in FL listening anxiety and FL listening strategy use.

## APPENDIX

### FL Listening Anxiety Scale and FL Listening Strategy Use Inventory

FL Listening Anxiety Scale					
1. I get upset when I'm not sure whether I understand what I'm hearing in English.	1	2	3	4	5
2. When I listen to English, I often understand the words but still can't quite understand what the speaker is saying.	1	2	3	4	5
3. When I'm listening to English, I get so confused I can't remember what I've heard.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I feel intimidated whenever I have a listening passage in English to listen to.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I am nervous when I am listening to a passage in English when I'm not familiar with the topic.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I get upset whenever I hear unknown grammar while listening to English.	1	2	3	4	5
7. When listening to English I get nervous and confused when I don't understand every word.	1	2	3	4	5
8. It bothers me to encounter words I can't pronounce while listening to English.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I usually end up translating word by word when I'm listening to English.	1	2	3	4	5
10. By the time you get past the strange sounds in English, it's hard to remember what you're listening to.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I am worried about all the new sounds you have to learn to understand spoken English.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I enjoy listening to English.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I feel confident when I am listening to English.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Once you get used to it, listening to English is not so difficult.	1	2	3	4	5
15. The hardest part of learning English is learning to understand spoken English.	1	2	3	4	5
16. I would be happy just to learn to read English rather than having to learn to understand spoken Arabic.	1	2	3	4	5
17. I don't mind listening to English by myself but I feel very uncomfortable when I have to listen to English in a group.	1	2	3	4	5
18. I am satisfied with the level of listening comprehension in English that I have achieved so far.	1	2	3	4	5
19. English culture and ideas seem very foreign to me.	1	2	3	4	5
20. You have to know so much about English history and culture in order to understand spoken English.	1	2	3	4	5
FL Listening Strategy Use Inventory	1	2	3	4	5
21. I pay attention to the first word to judge whether it is an interrogative sentence or not.	1	2	3	4	5
22. I try to catch every word that the speaker uses.	1	2	3	4	5



23. I guess the speaker's intention by picking up familiar words.	1	2	3	4	5
24. I pay attention to the words which the speaker slows down or emphasizes.	1	2	3	4	5
25. I pay attention to the first part of the sentence and guess the speaker's intention.	1	2	3	4	5
26. I try to respond to the speaker even when I don't understand him/her perfectly.	1	2	3	4	5
27. I guess the speaker's intention based on what he/she has said so far.	1	2	3	4	5
28. I don't mind if I can't understand every single detail.	1	2	3	4	5
29. I anticipate what the speaker is going to say based on the context.	1	2	3	4	5
30. I ask the speaker to give an example when I am not sure what he/she said.	1	2	3	4	5
31. I try to translate into native language little by little to understand what the speaker has said.	1	2	3	4	5
32. I try to catch the speaker's main point.	1	2	3	4	5
33. I pay attention to the speaker's rhythm and intonation.	1	2	3	4	5
34. I send continuation signals to show my understanding in order to avoid communication gaps.	1	2	3	4	5
35. I use circumlocution to react the speaker's utterance when I don't understand his/her intention well.	1	2	3	4	5
36. I pay attention to the speaker's pronunciation.	1	2	3	4	5
37. I use gestures when I have difficulties in understanding.	1	2	3	4	5
38. I pay attention to the speaker's eye contact, facial expression and gestures.	1	2	3	4	5
39. I ask the speaker to slow down when I can't understand what the speaker has said.	1	2	3	4	5
40. I ask the speaker to use easy words when I have difficulties in comprehension.	1	2	3	4	5
41. I make a clarification request when I am not sure what the speaker has said.	1	2	3	4	5
42. I ask for repetition when I can't understand what the speaker has said.	1	2	3	4	5
43. I make clear to the speaker what I haven't been able to understand.	1	2	3	4	5
44. I only focus on familiar expressions.	1	2	3	4	5
45. I especially pay attention to the interrogative when I listen to WH-questions.	1	2	3	4	5
46. I pay attention to the subject and verb of the sentence when I listen.	1	2	3	4	5

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